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THE NECKLACE

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"....Hm! Remarkable happenings—travelers from afar. Interesting, very interesting!" Page 36.

THE STORK'S NECKLACE

A STORY

BY

EMILY NONNEN



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I.

A TRAVELER FROM AFAR.

“Papa, papa, he has come! We’re so glad!” cried Sigismund and Marfa in chorus as they rushed into the smithy where their father stood at the anvil hammering on a red hot iron bar. “Come, papa, and have a look!”

“Who has come, my children?” inquired the father calmly, as he turned the heated iron with his tongs and continued his rhythmic beating. “Whose coming has caused all this excitement?”

“The stork, of course,” Sigismund declared. “You know we have been

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expecting him so long. We were beginning to be afraid that he wouldn't come back this year."

"Just as we were wondering what to do next," little Marfa broke in, "we heard a whiz and a beating of wings over our heads, and there was the stork just alighting on our roof where he began to tramp about with his long legs in his old nest from last year. You may be sure we were glad to see him, and we wanted you to see him, too."

"Patience, my children, till I have shaped this horseshoe, or the bailiff will make it unpleasant for us when he returns from town with his horse. The stork won't fly off, now that he has found his way here again."

"I wish that I could help you, papa, so that you would get through!" sighed Sigismund impatiently.

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"That day will come soon enough," the father declared. "There now, I guess I'm ready for you."

He laid aside his tools and wiped the sweat from his face, whereupon Sigismund and Marfa grasped each a hand and eagerly drew their father toward their cottage home which lay at the edge of the village not far from the smithy. There, over the front gable, they could see the great stork nest that had been empty all winter. Now a large white stork was fluttering about in the nest as if setting his home in order. For some time they stood eagerly watching the procedure; then the children uttered a shout of joy when they saw the mother stork swooping down from aloft. She had lingered behind the mate, possibly because she was not so strong and had

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tired from the long journey. They greeted each other with clacking of bills and promptly began to set to rights their home, disarranged by many a winter storm. It was funny to watch their queer antics as they worked with bills, legs and wings, and the children followed their movements with eager interest.

"Where is Lodoiska?" asked the father after watching the birds awhile.

"We couldn't find her," Marfa declared. "O, there she is!"

A young girl, some years older than Sigismund, entered through the garden gate. She carried a basket on her arm, from which she flung corn to the cackling chickens scrambling about her. She, too, was pleased to see the storks, and great was the children's delight when their sister enticed the

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storks from their nest and fed them with corn out of her hand. Without show of fear the storks moved sedately about as if in friendly greeting to old acquaintances after a long absence.

Lodoiska was the best behaved and the prettiest girl in the entire village, and she made a pretty picture standing there in the group formed by the long-legged storks, the two children dancing with joy, the sturdy blacksmith and the flock of chickens hovering on the outskirts from fear of the storks. To this group under the great linden with its buds just unfolding two persons presently joined themselves. They were the village schoolmaster Prakosch and his son Stanislas, a student at the University of Warsaw, home on a visit.

"Papa," said Sigismund, "the old women of the village declare that it

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is good luck when a stork builds his nest on your roof. Do you believe that, papa?"

"I believe it's all superstition," the father declared; "or what do you say, Prakosch? You are a man of education and know more than a simple fellow like myself."

"It isn't very likely," the old schoolmaster declared, "that a bird can bring either good or ill luck to a house. Other causes are at work to decide such matters. I believe that an honest man like Gregor Zamoiski and his pretty little daughter Lodoiska are sure to make a home happy even if no stork comes to build a nest on their roof."

Lodoiska turned crimson with embarrassment and hastened to give the conversation a different turn.

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"I wonder," she remarked, "where the storks go when they leave us in the fall. What fun it would be if they could give us an account of their adventures!"

"Scholars tell us," said Stanislas, "that they seek their winter homes in the far South; but how they find the way, and what happens to them on their journey are things that nobody can tell us unless the storks themselves find some means of revealing the secret.

"We have chattered long enough now," declared the schoolmaster. "It's time we were off to our lessons. Come, children."

Sigismund and Marfa patted the storks, kissed their father and sister, and followed Prakosch and his son to the schoolhouse.

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II.

LESKOW.

We will now cast a glance into the home on whose roof the friendly storks have built their nest for several summers. It lay on the outskirts of a Polish village on the great estates of the manor house of Leskow, which for centuries had belonged to the rich and powerful Leskowsky family. The present lord of the manor, Count Alois Leskowsky, had, however, not for years dwelt on or even visited his ancestral estates. Mourning over the tragic fate of his native land now languishing under the tyranny of Russia, the count had, as so many other Polish noblemen, spent his winters in Paris, and his sum-

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mers at German health resorts or in foreign travel.

Seldom did any news of the count reach Leskow. It was generally known that he found no pleasure in dwelling on his estates which he had entrusted to the management of his bailiff Muischek, a man who had won the confidence of the count by fawning and flattery, but who was feared and hated by his dependents for his cruel and domineering treatment of them. But their hatred of the bailiff was carefully concealed, and his despotic rule patiently endured, for no one knew who might become the next victim of his greed and intrigues. The count seemed content if the rents were paid on time, without taking a thought to the extortionate means used by his bailiff to collect them.

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The stately manor house lay on a slope gently rising from the banks of the Narew River. An air of desolation seemed to hold sway about the place; owls inhabited the ivy-clad towers, and there were traces of the war's devastation which had penetrated even to these remote regions.

One wing alone of the great house was inhabited and in good order, namely that in which the bailiff lived, and where he had gradually collected from the rest of the manor house its most priceless furnishings which he had come to look upon as his own.

The extensive park surrounding the manor house still bore traces of former grandeur; but the trees, once trimmed to represent quaint figures of birds and animals, were now unkempt and their stems overgrown with moss. Here and

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there remains of statuary could be seen, some headless, others without arms, and still others were lying prostrate and overgrown with creepers and wild brier bushes. The fountain in the artificial lake no longer played, and the gold fishes were dead and gone; here and there a water lily bobbed upon the turbid waters. A lonely peacock paced up and down the grass-grown paths dejectedly dragging its tail as if it realized that it was useless to spread its gorgeous fan when there was no one to admire its play of colors.

How great the contrast, then, between the departed glories of the manor house and the simple but neat cottage inhabited by Gregor Zamoyski and his family! On his mother's side Zamoyski was of German stock and belonged to the so-called dissenters or

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protestants who at that time enjoyed religious liberty in the otherwise strongly Catholic Poland. Some years before, he had lost his splendid wife, whose death left the care of the household upon the tender shoulders of the oldest daughter, Lodoiska, who assumed the burden and performed the duties with a wisdom and skill seldom to be found in one so young. As well as she could she tried to fill a mother's place with the other children, and these more than repaid her by the warmth of their affection for her. The sturdy, impetuous Sigismund as well as the more tractable Marfa readily yielded to the mild sway of the elder sister whom both loved so well.

Gregor Zamoyski was a man of unusual thrift and diligence. His was not the shiftless, violent temperament so

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common among his fellow countrymen. His fields and meadows bore evidence of his careful and well-directed efforts. While his neighbors contented themselves to follow the old worn-out methods of their fathers, Gregor eagerly made use of the improved methods just then being introduced, and in these efforts he was greatly aided by his old friend, the schoolmaster Prakosch. The old man was a veritable bookworm, and when his son Stanislas came home on his vacations, the father found pleasure not only in his son's society but also in the many books he brought home to study at his leisure. Stanislas was specializing in agriculture at the University of Warsaw, and his notes and books on this subject were eagerly devoured by the father, who in turn made haste to impart his knowledge

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to his good friend and neighbor Zamoyski. The latter had never had the opportunity to learn to read; therefore he hailed with delight the visits of Prakosch and Stanislas to his cottage of an evening after the day's work was done. Together they would read and discuss the events and progress of the great world about them, while Lodoiska sat sedately at her spinning wheel and the children played in a corner.

Not content with his agricultural pursuits alone, Gregor had built a smithy where he worked at odd hours and especially during the winter months doing odd jobs for the bailiff and his neighbors and making improved agricultural implements from the drawings found in the books and notes of the young university student.

By diligence and thrift Gregor had

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won for himself a modest competency and the confidence and respect of all his neighbors. There was one, however, who viewed with ill-concealed spite and envy the neat cottage and well-tilled fields of Gregor Zamoyski, namely the bailiff Muischek. This man cherished a special grudge against Gregor partly because of the latter's frank and upright nature, and partly because Gregor had on several occasions foiled his well laid plains to prey upon his defenceless dependents by dishonest practices. Long had the bailiff brooded on revenge, but as yet no opportunity had presented itself to do him any serious harm. For Gregor was always prompt in the payment of his rents, and avoided as much as possible to expose himself to the petty persecutions of the bailiff, even bidding

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Sigismund to have as little to do as he could with Stefan, the bailiff's youngest son. Stefan was somewhat older than Sigismund, and a large, rawboned lad, quick and eager for mischief, but slow to do honest work in school or in the fields. He had his father's fawning ways, if he wished to gain his own selfish ends, but he had also learned from his father to treat his presumed inferiors with coarse insolence. His indulgent father had spoiled him by yielding to his every wish in spite of the constant protests of the sterner mother who saw the danger, and who was more attached to her oldest son, lately come home from the university to become his father's assistant and, if their plans did not miscarry, his successor when the father grew too old to perform the duties of his office.

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III

THE NESTLINGS.

On a glorious summer day Marfa had gone with Lodoiska to drive the cows to a distant pasture where a clump af trees afforded grateful shade. Gregor was busy in the field, and Sigismund was home alone vainly trying to invent some way to amsue himself. Suddenly he heard a faint cry coming from the roof of the cottage. He stiffened at the sound and presently heard it repeated somewhat louder and sounding like the wail of a little child.

"I know what it is!" he cried excitedly. "It's the stork babies come out of their eggs. I only wish that Marfa were here to enjoy the sight! But how

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shall I get up to the nest? Of course there is the ladder that father used when he climbed up to mend the roof. But I can never raise it without help."

Valiantly he tugged and heaved at the heavy ladder; but though he was strong for his age, the task was too much for him. Meanwhile the baby storks were piping away in their nest, and Sigismund's eagerness to reach them increased by leaps and bounds. Just then he heard some one behind call him by name. Quickly turning, he saw Stefan Muischek coming in through the garden gate.

"What are you trying to do?" Stefan asked, grinning at the vain efforts of Sigismund. "Have I caught you in the act of breaking and entering?"

"Stop your joshing!" cried Sigismund, "I'm trying to reach the stork

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babies on the roof. They have just come out of their eggs."

"Wait a moment and I'll give you a lift", said Stefan.

Though astonished at this act of condescension on the part of Stefan, Sigismund readily accepted the offer, for an extra pair of stout arms was needed to raise the ladder to the roof.

By their united efforts the ladder was soon raised, and the two boys clambered up to the nest.

"O how funny they look — one, two, three of them!" cried Sigismund who was the first to reach the nest.

"What ugly brutes with their long necks and red legs!" Stefan exclaimed.

Reaching past Sigismund, he grabbed one of the young birds roughly. This was too much for the stork mother who struck him viciously with her

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sharp beak and uttered such shrill cries that Stefan was glad to escape down the ladder with more haste than he had mounted it.

"Hideous things!" he cried nursing his hurt.

"They never harm me," Sigismund declared; "but then, you see, I am never rough with them."

"Who cares for the dirty beasts anyway!" Stefan exclaimed. "Come down here — I've got something to tell you."

"Well, what is it?" asked Sigismund when he reached the ground.

"I want to ask you," Stefan said in the coaxing tone he employed when he wished to gain his end, "if you would like to take a stroll in the woods with me. It's no fun to go alone, and I don't know where all the other boys are. I've set some snares for birds, and I

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want to see what success I've had.
Come along, that's a good fellow!"

Never before had Stefan spoken so kindly and then he had helped with the ladder, so Sigismund felt inclined to consent. Then he suddenly remembered his father's order to avoid associating with Stefan. He turned red as a peony and stammered in confusion:

"You see — — that is — — I'd like to go, but I don't know whether father would let me."

Scornfully Stefan burst into loud laughter.

"That's rich, I must say! Papa's little boy must ask papa's permission to go into the woods. No wonder all the boys in the village call you a sissy!"

"I'm no more sissy than you are!"

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shouted Sigismund; "but I promised Lodoiska — — —"

"Lodoiska! That's better still! Little brother tied to big sister's apron strings!"

"Shut up!" thundered Sigismund. "Nothing hinders me from going into the woods. It's only that — — —"

Shamefaced, he paused abruptly before he had time to blurt out the whole truth.

"Come along then, if nothing hinders you", coaxed Stefan. "Good company makes a short journey. You can turn back whenever you want to; but I'm sure we'll have a good time in the woods."

"He has been real kind to-day", mused Sigismund, "and I don't believe father would object to my going this once."

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So the two boys started off through the garden gate; but the first part of their walk was far from pleasant as they trudged on in the hot sun along the dusty highway. Besides, Sigismund's conscience troubled him, and he kept glancing back to see if his father were watching him. Sigismund had never felt like this before, and he wondered at the cause of it. Stefan did not fail to notice his comrade's uneasiness, and to distract him he began to tell all kinds of funny stories of pranks and adventures he had had until Sigismund was forced to laugh and so forgot the cause of his anxiety.

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IV.

IN THE WOODS.

Well within the woods, the boys seemed in a new world. The stately trees formed great temple arches over their heads. The glowing heat of the sun was subdued, as its rays filtered through the leaves and branches soughing in the gentle breeze, while a pleasing fragrance was wafted to them from the moss under foot, the sticky leaves of the balsam poplar above them, and the dripping resin of pines along their path. In the lofty treetops birds were warbling their midsummer carols; the song thrush was fluting its melancholy lay from the top of a neighboring fir, and leaping airily from branch to

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branch, a squirrel paused to gaze with bright eyes upon the intruders. Lost in wonder and admiration of the beauties about him, Sigismund momentarily forgot that he had strayed from the path of duty. Young as he was and ignorant of the ways of the great world, he yet had a mind responsive to the beauties of nature, and he often paused to exclaim upon these as if unwilling to miss the sights and sounds that held such charms for him.

"Stefan," he cried, "have you ever heard such singing before? Doesn't that wild briar smell sweet? See that gaudy butterfly! How his wings shine in the sun! O, isn't this soft moss a carpet for a king!"

But all unheeding, Stefan marched steadily on. What cared he for song of birds when it was the cry of distress

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of the poor captives in his snares that he was listening for? Much to his disgust he found not a single bird in his snares though these were displaced and scattered on the ground.

"Some one has been here before me!" he cried angrily, stamping on the ground so that the delicate pollen from the flowers under foot rose in tiny clouds. "If I can catch the wretch who did this, I'll soon teach him that it isn't safe to thwart the son of Muischek the bailiff!"

Sigismund was astonished and frightened at the fierce anger of his comrade.

"Now I must set out new snares", Stefan growled; "but I'll take care to place them where they will be safe from prying eyes."

To accomplish this the lads began to push their way through the thick

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underbrush, when Sigismund suddenly observed a slender spiral of smoke rising among the trees on their left, and at the same time he heard a queer, droning song that startled him. Creeping stealthily forward, the boys presently came in sight of a dilapidated brown tent through an opening of which they beheld two men lying asleep within, and a child wailing on the tent floor. Before the tent door stood a woman with a mop of tangled black hair hanging about a yellow, wrinkled face. A pair of sharp eyes peered from under brushy brows, and her gaunt form was wrapped in a faded blanket that bore traces of having once been gaudily colored. She was still humming a quaint, wild melody when the boys caught sight of her.

“Who is that ugly hag?” whispered

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Sigismund, restrained by Stefan's firm grasp from beating a hasty retreat.

"It must be the gypsy Wanda," Stefan replied. "A very wise old woman, people say. Come, we will have her tell our fortunes."

So saying, Stefan emerged from the bushes, dragging Sigismund with him.

"What are you boys doing here?" the old hag asked harshly.

"Snaring birds," Stefan replied carelessly.

"You'll have to quit that!" the gypsy cried. "The forest is my kingdom, and none but me and mine dare touch a living thing within it."

"Is that so?" drawled Stefan. "I wasn't aware that your authority was so extensive. They tell me that you are a wise woman. Come, we would like to have you tell our fortunes."

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"Sure, I will. Give me your hand—but first you must cross my palm with silver."

"Hard luck!" Stefan declared; "I left my money at home. Did you bring any money, Sigismund?"

"No — yes — come, Stefan, let's get out of here," pleaded Sigismund anxiously.

But Stefan reached into his comrade's pocket and drew out several coins.

"Let my money alone, Stefan!" cried Sigismund. "Father gave it to me to buy a slate with."

"Is this enough?" Stefan inquired without heeding the protests of his companion.

The gypsy hid the coins in some pocket about her person, then grabbed Sigismund's hand though he tried fran-

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tically to jerk it away. Intently she gazed into the boy's open palm while she mumbled some strange jargon. At last she began to sing softly:

“Fortune is a bird quite rare,
Quick to come, and quick to fare;
To the one she gives bright gold,
To the other earth's black mold.”

What's this? The lines in your palm cross each other strangely. Hm! Remarkable happenings — travelers from afar. Interesting, very interesting!”

Then seizing Stefan's hand, she gazed at it with glowing eyes until a chill of fear tingled through his marrow.

“Here I read a different tale”, she mumbled. “Ugly lines and evil days for you, you big scamp!”

“You nasty old witch!” cried Stefan tearing himself loose from her clutches

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and darting off into the woods followed by Sigismund.

When they finally stopped for breath, Sigismund begged that they should start for home, especially as he noticed that the sky was overcast, and the sultry air boded the coming of a thunderstorm. But they had now come out into a glade where the ground was red with wild strawberries, and where at the foot of an ivy-clad cliff a clear stream babbled invitingly over mossy stones. Nothing would do but that Stefan should stop here and enjoy the feast, and even Sigismund forgot his anxiety as he ate his fill of berries and then began to thread a quantity of them on straws to carry home to his sisters.

Suddenly a deep rumble of distant thunder was heard, and the black

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cloud overhead transformed the bright day to the gloom of twilight.

"I'll stay no longer", Sigismund declared firmly. "Show me the way, and I'll hurry home even if you don't come along. But oh, what will father say when he discovers that I have disobeyed him! And Lodoiska and Marfa, how worried they will be over my long absence!"

"What a milksop you are!" cried Stefan, his mouth full of berries.

A flash of lightning lit up the gloomy woods, followed by a crash of thunder overhead. Then even Stefan was terrified. Superstitious as all persons with a troubled conscience are, he thought that the old witch had conjured forth the storm to be revenged on him.

"Come!" she shouted, and darted off at full speed.

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Soon he perceived that the more active Sigismund threatened to outstrip him and leave him behind. By a desperate spurt he caught up with his companion at a turn in the path, and seizing him by the collar, he commanded him to keep even pace. The sudden jerk threw Sigismund off his balance, and he fell with his foot caught under a protruding root. He tried to rise and go on, but with a cry of pain he sank to the ground with a badly wrenched ankle.

Stefan's fear and anger were terrible to see. He kicked and pounded his prostrate comrade, commanding him to get up and come along. When he found that all his efforts were useless, he cried with a curse: "Lie there till you rot, then! I'm going to save my hide even if you don't!"

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So the wicked Stefan hurried off for home, leaving poor Sigismund suffering with pain and frightened by the storm. Incessant flashes of lightning lit up the sky, peal on peal of thunder reverberated through the forest, and great drops of rain trickled through the leafy branches down upon the poor lad. Sorrow and anguish filled his heart. Earnestly he prayed that God might forgive him for his disobedience, and save him from dying there all alone in the woods.

Lying thus weeping and wringing his hands, he heard the sound of approaching steps rustling among the leaves. With a cry of joy he sat up only to see with a sinking heart that it was the old gypsy mumbling to herself and moving through the woods with a bundle of sticks upon her back.

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"Ho, what have we here?" she exclaimed, as she caught sight of the boy. "Did that big scamp leave you to your fate? Hm, just what he might be expected to do!"

She approached and looked down upon the prostrate lad with an evil smile.

"Ha!" she hissed, "you were afraid of the old witch, weren't you? But why should you have such a fine cap when my poor grandchild goes bare-headed; or why should you have so neat a jacket when he wears rags?"

So saying, she calmly proceeded to appropriate cap and jacket in spite of Sigismund's frantic efforts to hinder her. She was just going to remove his vest also when a shot rang out in the forest. Sigismund called aloud for help, but was quickly silenced by a rag

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tied over his mouth, after which Wanda bundled up her booty and prepared to make off. But she had not taken many steps before a strong hand laid hold on her, and she found herself confronted by a young man with a gun slung across his back and a dead fox dangling from his shoulder.

"O, sir, have pity on a poor old woman!" she cried, dexterously twisting from his grasp and gliding off through the underbrush.

"O, it's Stanislas!" cried Sigismund when his gag had been removed. "The good God has heard my prayers! I feared that He had forsaken me as I had deserved. O, Stanislas, I'm so thankful!"

Sigismund threw his arm about his friend's neck and sobbed with relief and joy.

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The young student was not a little surprised to find Gregor's son in such a predicament, but a few words of explanation cleared up the situation.

"It was fortunate," Stanislas declared, "that the fox led me so long a chase. I din't want to lose him, otherwise I would not have lingered in the woods in such a storm — it is doubly dangerous under the trees. But I was anxious to secure the pelt as a lining for father's overcoat, so I forgot all about the storm. Now the creature must lie hidden in the brush while you take his place on my back, for I must get you home as soon as possible."

"I'm too heavy for you to carry all the way," Sigismund declared.

"Just the same I'll make the attempt", Stanislas smilingly declared. "But first I must have a look at your

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foot to see if we can ease the pain a little.

He found the ankle much swollen, but after binding it with a handkerchief dipped in the stream Sigismund felt greatly relieved. Then Stanislas carefully swung the boy on his back and set out briskly along the forest path.

How still the forest was after the storm! Not a sound was to be heard except the quick strides of the youth and his deep breathing as he now and then sat down on a stump to rest and catch his breath before again striding off under his heavy burden.

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V.

ANXIOUS MOMENTS.

Gregor and his daughters had returned from the fields.

“Sigismund must be off playing with the other boys”, the girls conjectured. But when time passed and the storm burst, they began to grow anxious concerning their missing brother. In spite of the heavy downpour both father and daughters rushed out into the village and made inquiries, but no one had seen the boy.

Meanwhile Stefan Muischek had arrived home, dripping wet and shaking from fear. He promptly undressed and went to bed; but he could not sleep, for his shameful action in deserting his

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companion troubled him. So he called his father, and explaining Sigismund's predicament asked him to inform Gre-gor about it.

"Let the boy lie there awhile", the bailiff replied with a scornful laugh; "it will teach him and his uppish father a well-needed lesson in humility."

Without more ado he dismissed the matter from his mind.

Meanwhile Lodoiska was anxiously peering out into the evening twilight where all nature was filled with the fragrant vapors rising after the storm. Suddenly she saw an object move out of the woods. It resembled a man bending under a heavy burden. After a few moments of doubt the truth flashed on her.

"It's Sigismund!" she cried. "Stanis-

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las is carrying him on his back. O, what has happened!"

At her call Gregor and Marfa appear, and all hasten to the gate which they reached just as Stanislas came up and carefully deposited his burden on the bench under the linden.

As father and sisters gathered around him, Sigismund tearfully related what had taken place and how Stanislas had saved his life.

Father and sisters poured out their gratitude to the young man who made light of it, disclaiming any credit in the matter.

"It was a lucky chance!" he declared.

"There is no such thing as chance!" Gregor solemnly declared. "It was the hand of God that directed your steps, my young friend; and to God in

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the first place will we give our thanks. As for you, Sigismund, your disobedience has already been punished. You will suffer pain and will have to keep still for some time to come. As for Stefan, his punishment will find him out sooner or later."

After this event the relations between Gregor Zamoyski and the bailiff became more strained and unpleasant than before.

After his drenching in the storm the bailiff's son became seriously ill. Stefan himself believed that the gypsy had bewitched him, while his father maintained that in some way Sigismund was to blame for the misadventure. Gregor demanded that the gypsies should be driven from the neighborhood, and that Wanda, especially, should be punished for her misdeeds. But the bailiff

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turned a deaf ear to the demands of Gregor and the other villagers who had suffered from the nightly raids on their gardens and henhouses. It was generally rumored in the village that when Wanda learned that one of the two lads she had treated so roughly was the bailiff's son, she arranged a secret meeting with the father in the woods, where she paid him a sum of money to drop the matter.

So it came about that the condition of the villagers grew daily worse as they groaned under the repeated extortions and cruelties of the dishonest bailiff.

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VI.

SOUTHWARD BOUND.

Autumn days were fast approaching. After weeks of confinement on account of his sprained ankle, Sigismund was again up and about, and one day we find Gregor and his children before the smithy door pleasantly conversing with the old schoolmaster, who made use of every opportunity of associating with these kind and honest neighbors.

They were speaking of the storks which of late had been restlessly flying about their nest in ever widening circles. It was clear to see that they were preparing for their annual migration to the South. The children were wondering, as they had so often done, if

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it was the old birds or the young ones that returned in the spring, or if an entirely new pair made their home in the old nest on the roof.

"Dear Papa," said Lodoiska to her father hammering a piece of sheet iron, "just think if we could find some means of discovering whether our old friend returns or not. A little ring, for example, around his neck. He is so tame that it wouldn't be hard to attach it."

"No, that would be easy enough," Gregor replied. "It won't take me more than a minute or two to shape a thin iron band."

"O, what fun!" cried Marfa, clapping her hands.

"But there must be an inscription on it," Sigismund declared, "so that the people where the stork makes his win-

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ter home will know where he came from."

"Then it must be in Latin", declared the schoolmaster Prakosch, "for that is understood by educated people all over the world. If only Stanislas were home! He would quickly have hit upon a suitable inscription."

"What's the name for stork in Latin?" asked Lodoiska.

"Ciconia," replied the old man. "Wait a minute — perhaps I can manage it. This will do, I think:

HAEC CICONIA

EX POLONIA

which means, This stork is from Poland. If any one in a distant land reads the inscription, he will know whence our friend came; and if papa stork returns next spring with the iron

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necklace round his neck, we will all know that he is our old acquaintance who has built his nest here for years."

Without delay Gregor shaped and polished a thin iron band, whereupon the schoolmaster with a sharp steel point engraved the Latin inscription. Then Lodoiska, whom neither man nor beast could resist, gently called the stork from his high perch. Down he swooped to her side, and while he fed from her hand, and Marfa gently stroked his shining feathers, Gregor linked the band about his neck so that it could not slip off. The stork seemed to enjoy the attention shown him by his friends of long standing, for he clacked his bill and ruffled his feathers, then launched into the air, and calling his mate and young, he led the way into the deep blue sky, heading due

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south. The group about the smithy followed the stork family's flight with bated breath until it vanished from sight. Then with a sense of loss they turned their eyes to the empty nest on the roof.

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VII.

THE SUNNY SOUTH.

Faster than the flight of birds of passage, swifter than the winds of heaven, imagination speeds over land and sea, unrolling to our view dismal scenes of Northern forest or smiling landscapes of the sunny South. Thus on the wings of fantasy we are transported to far-off India where nature loves to appear in daring and striking contrasts.

On the banks of the majestic Ganges River towering palms waved their feathery crowns on slender stems when fitful breezes rose from the superheated ground. From dense thickets cactus flowers flamed, and the milky-white

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magnolia blossoms gleamed like stars against the dark-green foliage. Pink oleanders shed their heavy fragrance upon the still air, and parrots in all colors of the rainbow flitted like meteors among the flower-laden branches overhead. At some distance between two rows of dark cypresses towered a Hindu temple of snow-white marble covered with delicate tracery and topped by golden cupolas glittering in the sun.

In the midst of this luxuriant nature several young maidens might be seen slowly wending their way toward the river. The one who walked in advance bore upon her dark locks a diadem of gold and pearls, and her costly robe was richly embroidered with threads of silver and gold. The diaphanous veil that fell to her sandal-covered feet but partly concealed her features, and

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bright, flashing eyes shone through its gauzy folds. She was the princess Gooramma, the daughter of an Indian rajah, and the other maidens, who accompanied her bearing ornate fans of ostrich feathers, were her slaves and personal attendants.

When they reached the bank of the river, Gooramma took from the hands of an attendant a lighted alabaster lamp which she held aloft as kneeling upon the bank she prayed:

“O divine Ganges, reveal to me if my brother and his loyal friend and companion in arms, the brave Kasi-ma, are still in the land of the living, or if they have fallen on the field of battle.”

Then stooping, she carefully placed the burning lamp upon the surface of the water, watching it with

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bated breath as it floated gently down the stream. Sometimes the tiny flame would disappear among the lotus blossoms bobbing on the gentle ripples, only to appear again sailing serenely on its way. Once a larger ripple caused by a sudden gust threatened to engulf the lamp, and Gooramma uttered a cry of terror. But no, the frail bark righted itself, its light shone steadily until it finally vanished as a fading star in the misty distance.

Rejoicing and grateful for the happy omen, Gooramma turned to her attendants and exclaimed:

“O, what joy and comfort! Now of a surety I know that they live, for the flame was not quenched on its perilous passage down the sacred Ganges. But how sultry it is! I would rest and sleep a while amidst these beautiful sur-

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roundings. Do you, Zelica, fan me while I sleep; and do the rest of you pick flowers and make sprays and garlands for the morrow's festivities."

Thereupon Gooramma lay down upon an oriental rug spread over a soft bed of moss. Near her a fountain shot its jet of water aloft to fall in pearly showers into a marble basin. The melodious murmur of the fountain, and the heavy fragrance of rose and jasmine soon lulled the weary princess into dreamless sleep. Even Zelica felt the influence of the drowsy atmosphere; slower and slower grew her movements as she fanned her mistress, until the fan fell from inert fingers and she, too, slept.

Suddenly Gooramma was startled from her slumbers by a sharp hissing at her ear and the weight of a cold, scaly

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body on her neck. Alarmed her eyes flew open to look into the cruel, gleaming eyes of a cobra rearing its head above her. Petrified with fear, she could neither stir nor utter a sound. Instinctively she knew that in another second deadly fangs would pierce her throat.

Then with a mighty swoop huge wings swept down over her face, and a long beak seized the hideous snake and carried it high into the air.

Then only, when full realization burst upon her, did Gooramma utter a piercing shriek of terror. Zelica started from her sleep, and the other attendants came running from all directions, scattering flowers as they ran. Great was their alarm when they learned the cause of their mistress' terror.



"What's that about his neck?" asked Zelica. Upon closer inspection they discovered an iron ring fastened about the bird's neck. Page 63.

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Presently they heard a queer clacking sound above their heads. Looking up, they beheld a bird whose like they had not seen before. It was perched in a tree devouring with evident relish the writhing cobra, which seemed to form a choice morsel in its bill of fare. After the feast it glided down from the tree and began to parade back and forth among the startled group.

"What's that about his neck?" asked Zelica.

Upon closer inspection they discovered an iron ring fastened about the bird's neck. They were just examining this curiosity when an elderly gentleman with a book under his arm came up. He had heard Gooramma's cry of alarm and now arrived to learn the cause of it.

The gentleman was Mr. Elmore, a

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missionary who had spent many years in India organizing schools for boys and girls and instructing the natives in the Christian religion. Patiently he had labored for years to turn them from their cruel heathen worship and to open their hearts for the gospel of Jesus Christ. He was loved and honored by all who had come under the influence of his hallowed personality. Especially did Gooramma entertain for him feelings of respect and attachment, though she had but lately made his acquaintance, as since her father's death she had gone to live at the court of her uncle, the rajah.

When she saw the missionary approaching, she exclaimed: "Ah, here comes good Sahib Elmore! He knows everything and will explain this mystery to us."

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When Gooramma had related what had occurred, Mr. Elmore laid his hand as if in benediction on her head and said:

"God has miraculously preserved your life, my young princess. May it redound to the glory of His name! This bird, which God made use of to work His purpose, is a stork. In my native land I have seen many such. Let us see what is inscribed on his iron necklace.

'HAEC CICONIA
EX POLONIA.'

That's strange, very strange! He comes from a distant land, indeed! No doubt, he will return to it when spring comes there. A wonderful instinct guides the birds of passage over vast continents and trackless seas to their goal."

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"He has saved my life," declared Gooramma. "How shall I show him my gratitude? O, I know!" she added, removing a golden bracelet studded with precious stones from her arm. "Here, take this in place of the ugly iron band. Leila, summon at once the goldsmith, Noureddin. Meanwhile, as the stork is quite tame, we can keep him with us even if we have to tie a cord about his leg."

Gooramma petted the stork while thus momentarily depriving him of his liberty; and he seemed to enjoy the attention, for he clacked his bill and rubbed his head against the arm of the princess.

Noureddin soon appeared and found no difficulty in undoing the iron band. But before permitting him to fit the jeweled bracelet about the stork's neck,

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Gooramma declared that it must have a suitable inscription.

"Inscribe something," she ordered, "which will testify that we are returning the stork to his homeland with this gift of gratitude."

"Then we must employ the same language used on the iron necklace," declared the missionary. "But it must be very brief, for there's little space."

With an engraver's tool supplied by the goldsmith the missionary inscribed the following message:

"INDIA CUM DONIS
REMITTIT CICONIAM POLONIS."

(India returns the stork with gifts
to the Poles.)

Gooramma joyously clapped her hands when she saw the glittering circlet of gold adorning the stork's neck.

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As if conscious of the honor, the stork paraded before his admiring friends, submitting to caresses and listening to words of praise, as though he really understood what it was all about.

"See how kindly he nods! Perhaps it is his farewell greeting," exclaimed the princess.

As if to verify her words the stork suddenly spread his mighty wings, and mounting high into the sky, he sped away northward bound.

"God bless his flight!" exclaimed the missionary earnestly. "Though all unconscious of the fact, he has this day performed a noble deed. But, perhaps, it was not so wise to burden him with your golden necklace, my princess. Its weight seemed to trouble him. I fear he will never reach his northern home with the burden, even if

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some wicked person does not kill him for the treasure he bears."

"O, I'm so sorry!" exclaimed Gooramma, tears gleaming in her coal-black eyes. "I trust that my foolish fancy will not hinder his homeward flight. I meant it in all kindness — may it not bring misfortune to my deliverer!"

"But, my good Sahib," she continued, laying her hand upon the missionary's arm; "linger with us a while. Lay aside your book and come with me. There is so much that I would question you about."

"Gladly, my child!" declared the venerable old man.

So they strolled up to the cool kiosk under the shady tamarinds where ice-cooled sherberts, luscious mangoes, and

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other refreshing fruits were served on platters of gold and silver.

And here we must leave them, as the further events in the life of the beautiful Gooramma do not enter into this story. We trust and pray, however, that the good seed implanted by the missionary in her heart will in God's providence bear blessed and abundant fruit.

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VIII.

FOREBODINGS OF THE STORM.

The spacious manor house of Leskow seemed to frown down upon the village at the base of the rising ground on which it stood. Whether working in his smithy or busy in the fields, honest Gregor Zamoyski seemed more gloomy and depressed than of old. His lovely daughter Lodoiska observed him with anxious eyes as he went about his work, and she found it difficult to repress the tears that dimmed the beauty of her bright eyes.

Sigismund and Marfa were happy and carefree as in former days, for life is roseate and sorrows fleeting to persons of their tender years. A shadow

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did, however, cross the boy's countenance whenever he encountered Stefan's malicious glances, and so far as he could he avoided all intercourse with the bailiff's son.

Stefan's older brother, Gabriel, who was spending the winter at home, also caused the Zamoyski family much annoyance. He declared repeatedly that Lodoiska was the prettiest girl he had ever seen, and he pursued her with his flattering attentions whenever opportunity offered. The young girl, however, could not bear the sight of him, and would steal away whenever she observed him approaching. This naturally wounded his pride; and his admiration for Lodoiska was turned to bitter hatred of her as well as the other members of the family.

The harvest that year had not gen-

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erally turned out well. Of all the villagers Gregor alone seemed to have reaped a fair return for his faithful toil, and his well filled barns and granary were a source of envy to the greedy bailiff.

"It's strange," Muischek the bailiff kept repeating, "what large sums our gracious master, the count is demanding of me these days! His travels and his high living in Paris must be costing him huge sums. Where all the money is to come from is more than I can understand!"

Such words always preceded new attempts at extortion on the part of the bailiff, and there was none to champion the cause of the poor tenants except the fearless Zamoyski. But the only result of Zamoyski's efforts in behalf of the downtrodden peasantry was to

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call down upon himself additioned levies on his possessions. At last his good friend, the schoolmaster, was aroused and declared:

"I will write to the count myself and let him know how matters stand. It will not be my fault if the count is not filled with righteous wrath when he learns of the tyranny practiced here in his name. If only Stanislas, my son, were home! He could have expressed himself better than I. But I'll do as well as I can."

The letter was written and dispatched without the knowledge of the bailiff. Anxiously a reply was awaited, but none came. Either the letter had failed to reach its destination, or the count utterly disregarded the sufferings of his dependents. This latter possibility kindled bitter feelings in many a heart.

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The gypsies, who had spent the winter roving about in other parts, now returned with the coming of spring and began their plundering expeditions on barnyards and henhouses.

Again Gregor Zamoyski boldly demanded of the bailiff that he should use the power he possessed to put a stop to this nuisance. The only result was that the bailiff harshly told him to mind his own business, and he, the bailiff, would tend to his. But this he failed to do, and it was generally suspected that he was in secret league with these troublesome vagrants.

One evening just at dusk Sigismund came running in to his father crying that he had seen a man sneaking into the henhouse. Gregor rushed out and arrived just in time to nab a gypsy who was crawling through an opening with

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a pair of fat ducks under his arm. A well directed blow stretched the thief on the ground, and the quacking ducks waddled away to safety. Zamoyski turned to secure the gypsy, but he had wriggled away through the bushes and made good his escape.

Meanwhile old Wanda was sitting on a fallen tree in the woods, swaying from side to side and mumbling to herself as she awaited the coming of her son with the ducks for the morrow's dinner. When she saw him come limping empty-handed and with bloody nose, her eyes glowed with wrath, and beating her breast with doubled fists she hissed:

“This is the work of that wretch, Gregor! But never fear; he shall pay dearly for it! I will teach the rascal that the gypsy Wanda is not to be

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trifled with. Blood calls for blood! The bailiff will not lift a finger to prevent me, and, besides, he hates Gregor like poison. Come into the tent, my son, and I'll cure your hurts; then we will consider what to do."

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IX.

THE FIRE.

One night Lodoiska lay tossing sleepless on her bed, filled with a dread that she could not account for. At last, however, exhausted from the labors of the day she fell into a deep sleep. Suddenly she was aroused by a strong glare that lit up the whole room. Starting up from bed and looking out, she saw that one end of the barn was blazing. Marfa was also aroused, and the two girls rushed with loud cries into their father's room. Father and son were up in a moment, all rushed out into the barnyard where a sad sight met their gaze. The fire had started in the hay-loft and was rapidly spreading in all

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directions. Tongues of flame shot high into the air, and burning straw streamed aloft like fiery meteors. The children's cries aroused the neighbors, the first of whom to arrive upon the scene was Stanislas who had returned from Warsaw the day before. Seizing buckets and other receptacles, they carried water from the duck pond to dash upon the flames, but without any noticeable success. Fortunately the wind shifted, or all the buildings on the farmstead would have been consumed.

Gregor had promptly hastened to the stalls where the horses were housed. When he opened the door a choking cloud of smoke met him. Nevertheless he made his way in, and by the aid of Stanislas untied the shrieking animals and started to lead them out through the door when, frantic with

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fear, they jerked loose and plunged to their death into the blazing interior. This awful sight seemed to rob the assembled neighbors of all power of action. Mutely they stood gazing at the fire and at the pigeons fluttering overhead like silvery stars in the dark night.

With the shifting of the wind black clouds had gathered in the south. These now discharged a heavy shower of rain which prevented a further spread of the fire. With difficulty Lodoiska and Stanislas had succeeded in saving the poultry, but of the well-filled barns and granaries only smoldering heaps remained.

“That fiendish old witch, Wanda, is the cause of all this,” the villagers whispered to one another.

“I saw her sneaking about here after dusk,” said one, casting anxious looks

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about him, as if he feared that she would suddenly rise from the ground and cast an evil spell upon him.

Whispering thus and shaking their heads wisely, the villagers departed for their homes, as there was nothing more for them to do.

Left alone with his children, Gregor stood in mute despair gazing upon the ruins. The children watched him fearfully, for never before, even under the most trying circumstances, had he seemed so utterly dejected. At last, when he neither moved nor spoke, little Marfa threw her arms about his neck and cried:

“O Papa, if you only wouldn’t look so sad! That makes me feel worse than the fire!”

“Yes,” added Lodoiska, leaning her head caressingly against his shoulder.

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"Marfa is right. Just suppose our cottage had burned down and left us homeless! As it is we have at least a roof to shelter us."

This tender sympathy on the part of his children dissolved the icy despair of the father's heart. Tears gleamed in his eyes as he said:

"Yes, my dear children, we have our home, and we have each other. Thank God for that! Surely the dear God will not forsake us, though this loss is hard to bear, harder, perhaps, than we now realize. We must not lose courage but trust in the Lord who knows our need and can come to our aid. It's fortunate that I have laid by some money which will come in handy, now that we have lost so much. Come, let's go to bed. To-morrow we will plan for the future as best we can."

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But when they entered the cottage, a new misfortune stared them in the face. The room was in disorder, the chest containing the money broken open, and the money gone!

“The gypsy who tried to steal our ducks has robbed us!” exclaimed Sigismund.

No one doubted the truth of this, but how was the money to be recovered from such a gang of thieves who aided and abetted each other, and besides, were under the protection of the wicked bailiff!

“God help us now!” groaned Zamyski. “We are stripped of all we had!”

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X.

TROUBLES THICKEN.

A few days later Gregor and Sigismund were busy digging in the charred ruins which they were preparing to clear away. They were just talking about the stolen money, which their best efforts had not succeeded to trace or recover, when the bailiff Muischek and another man entered the yard and confronted them. Gregor grew suddenly pale, but with a mute nod he waited to learn their business with him.

"My dear friend," said the bailiff with a malicious grin; "I have here a letter from the count wherein he demands a large sum of money without delay. It will be hard for me to secure

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this sum on so short notice. So I come now to collect your rent which is due in a few days anyway, and in addition thereto I am compelled to increase the amount in accordance with figures you will find in this statement."

"Bailiff Muischek," exclaimed Gre-gor, "it's impossible! These charred ruins are all that's left of my posses-sions. Horses and cattle, all were lost in the fire. The money I had saved was stolen. Under such circumstances you see how impossible it is for me to make the payments you demand. But give me a little time, and I believe that I can obtain the money through the help of my friends, who know that I am an honest man."

"Mere evasions!" replied the bailiff harshly. "I know that you have some

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money hid away. Your cock-and-bull story of the stolen purse — — —”

“Mr. Bailiff!” shouted Zamoyski, crimson with rage, and thrusting his fist under the nose of his small enemy, whom he could have felled with a single blow. But with fine restraint he let his hand fall and stood looking the bailiff in the eye with cold contempt.

“So you threaten me!” the latter cried, averting his gaze and cautiously stepping back. “Let me tell you the result of that! I’ve brought with me my friend, the notary Plotov. If you don’t produce the sum demanded at once, we will make legal seizure of your house and all it contains, and you will be confined in prison until the last cent of your debt has been paid!”

“No, no; he shan’t, he shan’t!” cried Sigismund, wild with fear and rage.

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Away he sped to the schoolhouse shouting:

“Help, help! They are throwing papa into prison; they are murdering him!”

Stanislas ran to the rescue, followed more slowly by his father. Even a few of the villagers, who had heard the cry, appeared; but when they saw Muischek, they kept discretely in the background, for they feared the bailiff quite as much as they hated him. Stanislas, however, placed himself by Gregor's side as if ready to defend him against all the world.

“Arrest him, take him away! I command it in the name of Count Leskowski!” shouted Muischek to the burly notary.

But when Plotov made to lay hold on Gregor, Lodoiska intervened, and

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falling on her knees before the bailiff, she stretched up her arms and tearfully sued for mercy for her father.

"Ha, ha!" mocked Muischek, thrusting her aside; "that's the proper attitude for such proud rabble that consider yourselves too good to associate with the bailiff Muischek's sons! Cry your eyes out, girls, and howl, you whelp of a boy! It won't help you any! Pride goes before fall. Do your duty, Plotov!"

Stanislas had rushed forward to support the fainting Lodoiska and defend her father. Hot anger seethed within him, but Zamoyskis firm hand held him in check.

"Don't lose control of yourself, my young friend," he murmured. "It won't help matters."

Thereupon he turned to the crowd of

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villagers who had gradually drawn nearer, and said :

“I know that in our unhappy country there is no longer any fair dealing for the poor man who is little better than a slave. But I appeal to our common overlord, Count Leskowski. Let him be judge between the bailiff and myself!”

The bailiff burst into a loud laugh of scorn.

“I am vested with full authority from the count,” he declared, “to deal with you as I see fit. So that dart of yours missed its mark, my friend!”

“Then I appeal to God!” said Gregor solemnly. “He is full of compassion, and will come to the aid of the poor and needy.”

“Then your God must let a shower of money rain down from heaven!”

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cried Muischek with a wicked sneer. "Come, Plotov, we have dallied long enough! Arrest him at once in the name of the law!"

They laid hold on Gregor and were just going to drag him away when a pair of mighty wings swooped down beside him with a loud clacking noise. The two officers of the law shrunk back in terror, but Sigismund cried joyfully:

"It's our stork that has come back to us! What's that about his neck? See, it glitters in the sun! It surely isn't the old iron necklace!"

"It's gold and precious stones instead of iron!" declared Prakosch, the old schoolmaster, after a hasty examination.

The bailiff's eyes opened wide with amazement when they fell upon the

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treasure, and he stretched out greedy hands for it as a vulture extends its talons over its prey.

"Give me the trinket!" he cried. "It belongs to the count. All that creeps on the ground or flies in the air over his estate belongs to him. Wring the neck off the ugly creature, and you will get it more easily."

At these words Stanislas stepped up, struck aside the bailiff's hand, and with the help of Sigismund quickly unfastened the link that held the precious necklace, and holding it aloft, he cried:

"This belongs to Gregor. For years the stork has built his nest on Gregor's roof and belongs to him as much as his domestic animals do. With the money from the sale of this necklace he can easily pay his rents. I will hasten off to some jeweler in Pultusk and find a

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purchaser. Wait here a while, bailiff, till I return with the money."

"There's my horse over there all saddled and bridled," whispered one of the villagers. "Take it, and hurry off while you can."

"Stop him! Catch the thief!" cried Muischek. "He is making off with the count's property."

But no one made a move to stop Stanislas, who swung into the saddle and shouted:

"Let no one lay hands on Gregor till I return with the money. Promise me that, friends!"

With a rattle of pebbles and in a cloud of dust he galloped off, and the swift little horse, as if sensing the importance of speed, covered the distance to Pultusk in record time.

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XI.

THE GOLDSMITH.

When Stanislas arrived at Pultusk, he rode straight to the street where he knew the goldsmith Jarosinski had his shop. An acquaintance whom he met promised to care for the horse, so Stanislas was free to hurry directly to Jarosinski's shop.

Behind the counter stood a small, humpbacked man with yellow skin and black, penetrating eyes. Several women were pricing trinkets, and in a far corner sat a gentleman richly dressed and scanning the pages of a newspaper.

"What can I do for you, my young friend?" inquired the goldsmith when the women had taken their leave.

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"I would like to know," said Stanislas, "what this necklace is worth, and if you are willing to buy it."

So saying he laid the necklace in the goldsmith's hand, who viewed with amazement the precious ornament and cast suspicious glances upon the youth.

"This is a trinket of great value," he finally said. "Where did you get it?"

So as briefly as possible Stanislas told the story of the stork and his two necklaces, explaining at the same time how eager he was to exchange the precious ornament for money in order to free an honest man from a difficult situation. So interested was he in telling his story that it never occurred to him that any-one would doubt his word.

"Wait a moment, my lad," said Jaro-sinski, going to the window for a better

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inspection of the necklace, and at the same time pulling a bell cord.

Upon the signal a boy appeared to whom the goldsmith whispered a message and sent him away.

"Well," cried Stanislas impatiently, "shall we make a deal? Every moment is precious, and there is no telling what may happen if I don't return promptly with the money."

"Tut, tut!" exclaimed the goldsmith; "slow and sure is the word. A transaction of this size can't be settled all in a moment."

The old man began to dicker back and forth. Repeatedly he held the necklace up to the light, repeatedly he rubbed it with a woolen cloth, and consumed so much time that Stanislas at last lost patience.

"There are other goldsmiths in Pul-

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tusk," he declared. "Perhaps one of them may be more ready to make a deal with me."

So saying he attempted to snatch the necklace from the old man's hand. But just then the shop door flew open, and the messenger boy appeared, followed by two officers of the law.

"There," cried the goldsmith pointing to Stanislas, "is a young man who is in a great hurry to sell a very valuable ornament that he has come by dishonestly. His story of a stork and a necklace is a silly fabrication. Place him under arrest until I have time to straighten out this matter. It might cost me dear to deal in stolen property of so great value. Besides, there is a notice in the paper that a rich lady of Warsaw is advertising a reward for the

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recovery of some stolen jewels. Perhaps this is one of them."

At first Stanislas stood there as if turned to stone. Then with blazing eyes and lifted arms he jerked loose from the officers, loudly protesting his innocence.

"Believe me," he cried, "the happiness, perhaps the very life, of a whole family is at stake! Come with me and make inquiries at Leskow, and you will learn the truth."

"Perhaps he is in league with other thieves," the goldsmith declared. "I have heard that there are persons of ill repute loitering about Leskow. Take him into safe keeping, my friends, and you shall share in any reward I may receive for restoring the necklace to its rightful owner."

All this while the gentleman in the

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far corner of the shop had been taking a quiet nap. But aroused by the loud voices and catching the last words, he advanced to the excited group by the counter.

"Take your hands off the youth!" he commanded the officers, as one accustomed to be obeyed. "This young man doesn't look like a thief. Of what is he accused?"

"O, Sir!" cried Stanislas, new hope lighting up his handsome features; "surely, you'll take the word of an honest man! I swear on my honor that it was the stork and no one else that brought this necklace when he returned to his nest on Gregor Zamoyski's cottage, and the welfare of a whole family depends on my success in exchanging the trinket for its value in money."

"It's a queer story," declared the un-

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known gentleman. "Where do you live, young man?"

"At Leskow, on a large estate not far from here."

"Leskow! Who owns the estate?"

"Count Alois Leskowski."

"Why didn't you turn to him, then, in your difficulty?"

"Because, Sir, he has not been home for many years. I'm afraid he doesn't care about the sufferings of his people. My father has ventured to write him several letters about it, but there has been no answer to them."

"That's bad!" said the stranger soberly. "Perhaps the letters never reached the count. Such things happen nowadays. Come, tell me again the story of the necklace and the persons whose welfare depend on it. And I warn you, goldsmith and officers, to

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keep your hands off this young man. I'm here to see justice done and the truth discovered, not to shield a criminal. Now let's hear your story, my young friend."

The stranger seated himself and listened attentively while Stanislas described briefly but vividly the condition of affairs at Leskow and the events of the last few days. The only sign of interest the stranger manifested was to wrinkle his brow when mention was made of the bailiff's extortions and the suffering of the tenants.

When the story was ended, the stranger arose and said: "I will look into this matter, as it seems to me of some importance. I am personally acquainted with Count Leskowski, having met him in Paris, and I think that he should be informed of conditions on his estates."

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"But, Sir!" cried the goldsmith anxiously, "I don't know what right you have to — — —"

"Calm yourself, my friend," interrupted the stranger, leaning over the counter and whispering a few words to Jarosinski. At the same time he opened his pocketbook and produced a bill or a card, Stanislas could not see which; but the result was magical, for the fierce little goldsmith became meek as a lamb. He removed his cap, made a deep bow, and placed himself humbly under the stranger's orders.

"Give me the necklace," the latter ordered. "I will make it my business to see whether it fits about the neck of a stork."

It was manifestly a torture for the goldsmith to surrender the necklace, but there was nothing else for him to

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do. Almost with a groan he placed it in the stranger's hand. The latter declared that his carriage stood before the hotel opposite. Stanislas was asked to get in, the two officers followed in a cart, a servant mounted Stanislas's horse, and the coachman was ordered to drive at full speed to Leskow. So in a cloud of dust the queer procession set out, Stanislas sitting with beating heart beside the mute, mysterious stranger.

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XII.

THE STORM BREAKS.

Meanwhile a feverish anxiety consumed the villagers gathered at the farmstead of Gregor Zamoyski. Gregor himself sat with folded hands silently brooding. Now and again a sigh escaped him when his glance fell upon his children standing as a body-guard about him. Lodoiska stood gazing down the road along which Stanislas had vanished, momentarily expecting his return, even before sufficient time had elapsed for him to reach the city. At every whirl of dust in the distance she started joyously only to have her hopes dashed. Marfa and Sigismund spent the time alternately

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caressing their father and their old friend, the stork. The latter was just rejoicing in the arrival of his mate, and presently both were happily clacking and scratching in the old nest on the roof. Occasionally the male would swoop down into the yard as if curious to learn the cause of the large gathering there. Little did he realize how important a part he was playing in this drama.

The old schoolmaster was striding back and forth in an agony of suspense impossible to describe. He had dismissed the school, for who could think of lessons when the fate of the entire village hung in the balance? Dark forebodings regarding his son also filled his heart, for his experience of the world had taught him that Stanislas had undertaken a mission difficult to carry through. 104

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The bailiff sat beside the notary Plotov on a bench near the gate. As time dragged on his face grew darker and more forbidding. Nothing could have induced him to delay so long, had he not feared to lose the money which Stanislas would be bringing back. He must be present in person to see that not a penny of the price of the trinket should be withheld from him. Whatever happened, he had his victim in his power. If the bird writhed a little longer in the hawk's claws, so much the worse for the bird — its fate was sure! But in some way that he could not explain fear mingled with his sense of triumph. As is the case with all petty tyrants, he was a coward at heart. Not without anxiety did he view the increasing number of villagers assembling about the place. Drawn thither

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by curiosity as well as sympathy, their increasing numbers kindled their courage long repressed under the yoke of oppression, and their hatred of the oppressor began to vent itself in threatening murmurs that by degrees increased in volume. In union there is strength, and the villagers, who had for years groveled in the dust before their cruel master, now seemed ready to turn upon him and strike down the oppressor. All this Muischek observed as he sat squirming upon the bench and keeping a watchful eye upon the tenants.

"We must put an end to this farce," he muttered to the notary. "By this time Stanislas has made good his escape with his booty. We'll catch that young scamp later; but if we delay here longer, the rabble will grow so numerous that it will venture to disregard my

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commands and even rise against me."

At that moment Stefan came running up to see what was delaying his father so long. The boy was somewhat surprised to see the large gathering and the sullen faces; but before he could ask any questions, his father called him and began to whisper some message in his ear.

Gregor, who was standing near, caught a word here and there: "The gypsies — — a few strong men — — take the carriage — — hurry!"

Having received his instructions, Stefan hurried off at top speed.

Meanwhile Lodoiska had been busily preparing a meal of the best that the house contained, to which she planned to invite the bailiff in order to keep him in good humor while waiting for Stanislas's return.

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"It's rather late, I know," she said to the bailiff, "but you and the notary must be so hungry that even my simple meal will be welcome."

They readily accepted the invitation and sat down to the meal prepared for them, being careful, however, to take Gregor along so as not to lose sight of him. But though the others ate with relish, Gregor could not swallow a morsel, so full was his heart of anxiety and suspense. After the meal they returned to the yard, eager to be on hand when Stanislas should arrive. The sun was sinking in the west and already concealed behind the lofty trees of the forest, but still no sign of Stanislas.

The bailiff's patience was at an end; and when he noticed that several villagers, weary of waiting, were departing for their homes, and hearing also

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the rumble of approaching wheels, he thought that the moment had come for him to act.

"That's Stefan and the gypsies," he thought. "The lad is prompt, and not at all like his lazy brother Gabriel. Perhaps he met Wanda and her people on the way."

"Is there any one who longer doubts," he said aloud, "that Stanislas, the thief, has fled with the bracelet? Shut up, Prakosch! You are all nothing but a worthless rabble! I've exercised patience with you for years, but now it's ended. My carriage will soon be here to convey Gregor to where he belongs. He'll trouble me no more. Do your duty, notary, and place an attachment on all his belongings."

Thereupon he seized Gregor by the collar and tried to drag him away. But

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Gregor threw him off and turned to embrace his children who were weeping violently and clinging to him.

"My children, my dear children," he said with choking voice; "I can only pray God to bless and keep you. Love and serve him, and pray for your unhappy father. Good-bye, and God be with you now and ever!"

"Stop your foolish chatter!" shouted the bailiff harshly. "Come away from those brats! Ah, here are my people, at last, to help me!"

Suddenly Stefan and a half dozen fierce looking gypsies rushed upon the scene. Bringing up the rear appeared Wanda with her streaming hair and piercing black eyes. In a moment Gregor was surrounded, while the villagers drew back in fear. The children shrieked, the storks excitedly clacked

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their bills, and Prakosch tore despairingly at his gray locks. A fearful hubbub arose when the wild gypsies tied Gregor's arms and began to drag him to the carriage awaiting him outside the gate. But during the confusion another vehicle had arrived, and out of it now stepped a tall gentleman clad in rich furs.

"Stop!" he shouted in a voice that caused instant obedience.

"Who dares to give orders here?" cried Muischek confronting the stranger.

A single look caused him to turn pale, his knees trembled, and he sank to the ground stammering: "Count Leskowski!"

"Yes," proclaimed the stranger in a loud voice; "it is I, Count Leskowski, who to my shame must admit that too

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long have I neglected my duty to you, my friends."

At these words the astonished villagers flocked around him, eager to see and hear their master so unexpectedly come back to them.

"Come here, Stanislas!" he called. "Free this honest man from his bonds. He has you to thank for his deliverance."

"Mercy, gracious Master; mercy for one who has served you long and faithfully!" cried Muischek, as he lay groveling at the feet of the count.

"Who never has shown mercy has no right to expect it!" declared the count sternly. Then turning to the officers who had accompanied him, he said: "Arrest that man, and see that no gypsy escapes."

"We have attended to the gypsies,"

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said one of the villagers. "They're all trussed up good and fast, and with them the old hag Wanda."

"That's fine!" the count exclaimed. "Take the filthy pack away, or they will poison the air for us all."

Gregor and his children now presented a touching sight. They could not utter a word, so deeply were they stirred; they could only laugh and cry by turns, as they stood fondly clinging to each other. Gregor was the first to regain control. Accompanied by the children, he stepped up to the count and stammered forth his simple but warm words of gratitude. The three children sank to their knees, but the count raised them to their feet one by one, and kissed each on the brow.

"Don't thank me — thank the young

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man there!" he protested, pointing to Stanislas. "Poor boy! He was almost thrown into prison as a thief for your sake! Ah, here we have Father Prakosch! I remember you well since the time when I was a wild little boy. You had some trouble, I fear, in teaching me my letters. I congratulate you on having such a splendid son as Stanislas!"

The schoolmaster bowed his humble acknowledgement; with burning cheeks Lodoiska shyly pressed the hand of Stanislas; the smaller children danced joyfully about their hero, entirely forgetting the count's presence, and amidst the general rejoicing the storks clacked in sympathy from their nest on the roof.

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XIII.

AFTER THE STORM.

Count Leskowsky seated himself under the great linden in the yard and began to explain the reasons for his long absence from home. The chief of these was that he could not endure to reside in his native land after this had been dismembered by hostile foreign powers. Bailiff Muischek, he regretted to say, had won his full confidence, and had therefore been left to manage the estate. He now realized that the postmaster in Pultusk was in league with the bailiff, for no complaints had reached him from his dependents, and in consequence he was left in ignorance of their ill treatment. Of late the income from his estates had materially decreased, and this the bailiff charged to the laziness and insub-

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ordination of the tenants. However, through an acquaintance, who had lately spent some time in Pultusk, he had learned of the sorry plight of his people through the persecutions of Muischek, and of Gabriel's extravagance and riotous living. The count had therefore determined to return home and obtain personal knowledge of the state of affairs. It was on this homeward journey that he had encountered Stanislas in Pultusk, and had been the means of saving him from an unpleasant situation.

"The rest you know," said the count, concluding his story. "But here is the fateful necklace. Let us see how it looks on the neck of the stork!"

Upon Sigismund's call the stork flew down from his high perch and seemed quite proud when the glittering ornament was fitted about his neck.

"Look!" cried Sigismund; "I believe there is an inscription on the necklace, but I can't read it."

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The count produced his eyeglasses and examined the inscription.

"Sure enough!" he exclaimed; "this is what it says: 'India cum donis remittit ciconiam Polonis.' Truly a precious gift that India sends to our stricken land! But that reminds me of a letter from a missionary in India lately published in an English paper. It tells of a Hindu princess whose life was saved by a stork. It seems that while the princess was asleep, a stork swooped down upon a cobra that was about to strike her. The stork had an iron band about his neck containing the inscription: 'Haec ciconia ex Polonia.' Prompted by gratitude for her rescue, the princess had substituted a jeweled necklace inscribed: 'India cum donis remittit ciconiam Polonis.' The writer of the letter wondered if the stork would ever reach his northern home with the precious necklace. And here we have him, the same faithful stork that has

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twice been instrumental in saving human life, for the stork must also be credited with the rescue of Zamoyski from the clutches of the bailiff and his gypsies."

"Wonderful, indeed, are the ways of Providence!" Gregor exclaimed fervently; in which sentiment all present heartily joined.

"Gregor," said the count, "I owe you reparation for all that you have suffered through my neglect. I will pay you full price for this unique necklace which I intend to treasure among my most precious jewels. Besides, I will give your pretty daughter Lodoiska a suitable dowry on her marriage day, which, to all appearance, is not far distant, if I am to judge by the actions of yonder pair of lovers. O, Stanislas, a word with you, if Lodoiska can spare you a moment! I will need a secretary to help me to straighten out my affairs and gradually overtake their manage-

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ment. He must be a reliable young man with a good education and plenty of initiative. I think that you would suit me for this position. What do you say to it?"

"O, my Lord," stammered Stanislas, "if I dared — if I thought that I could fill the place!"

"That's settled, then," declared the count. "You will not find me a harsh master, though I have sadly neglected my duties up to this time. Well, Sigismund, my lad, what is it? I see that you are bursting with something to tell me."

"O, my Lord," stuttered the boy, "it's about Stefan, the bailiff's son. I know he isn't a good boy, but he'll get worse if allowed to associate with those wicked gypsies."

"Quite right, my little friend," the count exclaimed, patting Sigismund on the head. "I'll try to place him under better influence. As for yourself, you

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must tell me what you want to be when you grow up, and I'll help you in every way possible."

Then turning to Marfa, he produced a heart-shaped medallion studded with turquoises, saying: "Here, my little friend; this is for you. You shall wear it on a chain around your neck in memory of this day."

"And now, my friends," he added, addressing the assembly of men and women gathered in Zamoyski's yard: "When we have put the manor house in order, I will invite you all to a banquet. On that occasion we will discuss and decide upon all needed improvements, and I trust that we can work in harmony to restore Leskow and bring back prosperity to both master and tenant. Gregor, you and Stanislas will present yourselves at the manor house early in the morning. There are several important matters that I want to

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consult you about. And now, my friends, good-night to you all!"

As the count drove off, loud cheers arose from his overjoyed tenants, and even the storks clacked excitedly and flapped their huge wings.

The stars were twinkling in the sky, and the song thrush was singing his evening psalm when Count Alois Leskowsky arrived at his ancestral home after years of wandering over the wide world.

That same evening a happy group was assembled about the table in Zamowskis cottage. Besides the members of the family, Prakosch and Stanislas were present, and all united in words of praise and gratitude to the count whose coming had brought about such a wonderful change for the better.

"But we must not forget our friend the stork," cried Marfa with sparkling eyes. "Just think what would have become of us if he hadn't arrived in the nick of time!"

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"After all," declared Sigismund, "I don't think that people are far wrong when they say that a stork brings good luck to a home."

"It wasn't the stork, my boy," replied the father earnestly. "It was God who guides the stork on his pathless journey, and without whose will not a sparrow falls to the ground. Never forget this day, my dear children! Never cease to be grateful to God for our wonderful deliverance! To God alone be the praise and glory!"

The Little Peacemaker

The tanner and the baker were neighbors and the best of friends. The yellow apron of the former and the white apron of the latter hobnobbed amicably together while their owners faced each other discussing affairs of state. When a child was born to the tanner, the baker was godfather to it at the christening. When the baker found it necessary to replace some superannuated apple or pear tree in his orchard, the tanner always selected the sturdiest sapling from his own orchard to take its place.

Whenever any of the great festivals of the year occurred, the baker's wife, who had no children of her own, would swing a large basket over her arm and betake herself to her neighbors. There she was immediately surrounded by a troop of jubilant youngsters, every one of whom was her godchild, and among them all she distributed with lavish hand the goodies

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hidden under the white napkin in her basket. At one time it woud be gifts sent them from the Easter rabbit, at another time some gift from the Christmas angel himself. The greater the joy of the little ones over their gifts, the closer the tie that bound mother and godmother to each other. You need not be a fortune teller in order to predict that the friendship existing between the two families would last through life.

It happened, however, that the tanner and the baker was each the proud owner of a dog. The former, who was devoted to the chase, had a large brown hunting dog that answered to the name of Chaser. The latter owned a little snow-white poodle called Mordax. Each naturally considered his own dog the best and smartest to be found. It happened, one day, that Mordax quarreled with Chaser regarding the ownership of an especially choice and toothsome bone. He had, no doubt, forgotten for the moment how dangerous it is to question the rights of one's superiors. At first they growled, then they snapped, finally they were locked in deadly combat, and before the baker had time to rush

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from the green bench under his kitchen window, poor Mordax, his throat torn and bleeding, lay expiring, while Chaser with tail erect retired from the field of battle, the bone of contention carried triumphantly in his mouth.

Highly incensed, the owner of murdered Mordax hurled a large stone after the fleeing assassin. But alas, for his aim! The stone flew over Chaser's head, crashed through the tanner's sitting room window, missed the tanner's head by a hair, made a breech in the political news he was reading, and landed on the table with a bang. Without giving himself time to investigate, the tanner flung up the broken window, and gave vent to his wrath and indignation in no uncertain terms. The baker, standing in his own yard with immaculate, white apron and rolled up sleeves, put up a courageous defense. Old and young from near and far assembled to witness the wordy conflict. The baker was the first to retire from the field, but only to begin legal proceedings against his neighbor and one time friend. The sun descended upon their wrath, and the next day they faced each other before a justice of peace. The

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tanner was fined five dollars, though he, as a good hunter, protested that the wretched poodle was not worth two cents. The baker was also fined for breaking the window and disturbing a peaceable neighbor while reading the news of the day. Both were ordered to share equally in the costs of the trial.

This untoward occurrence caused a wide breech in the relation between the two families. No longer were friendly nods and greetings exchanged between the members of the two families. If the tanner's wife took the left side of the street in going to church, the baker's wife would invariably take the right. If the baker saw the tanner approaching, he suddenly discovered that he had business to transact on the other side of the street. And meanwhile, the tanner's poor little ones, who had neither part nor share in the quarrel of their elders, were almost heartbroken because their once so kind godmother no longer came to them with gifts from the Easter rabbit or the Christmas angel.

Thus matters went along for about three years. Then one afternoon the tanner and his wife sat down to drink their three

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o'clock cup of coffee, when it was discovered that there was not a coffee roll left in the house. Little Helmer, who made the discovery, eagerly volunteered to procure a new supply.

"Mother," he said, "give me some money, and I will buy some rolls for you."

Then turning to his father, he added: "This time I won't go so far. If the baker round the corner hasn't got any, I'll run in to godfather and buy some, as we used to do long ago."

The tanner, who saw the finger of God in this, said neither yes nor no, but permitted his little son to do as he pleased.

The baker round the corner had sold all his rolls, as Helmer suspected would be the case. But far from being disheartened on this account, the youngster returned past his own home, singing at the top of his voice:

"To-day I'm going to my godfather! Yes, to-day I'm going to my godfather!"

Displeased at this show of enthusiasm, the tanner started up to silence his child, but before he could raise the window to do so, Helmer had already disappeared within the door of his godfather's shop.

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Presently he reappeared as a dove of peace, but instead of an olive branch he bore triumphantly a large ring of the choicest of coffee bread.

As he came skipping into the room, he cried: "Godfather sends his greetings to father and mother, and he hopes that I will come again."

That same evening the two neighbors exchanged a friendly, though somewhat shamefaced, greeting over the garden wall separating their homes, and the next day the yellow apron was again hobnobbing with the white apron, as their owners sat on a bench under an apple tree in the baker's orchard. On the third day the two wives were proudly displaying to each other the fruits of their labors at the loom. During the three past unhappy years warp and woof had been frequently moistened by their briny tears. As for Helmer, the baker and his wife loved him as though he were their own child. By a painless death the tanner quietly disposed of his dog Chaser, who had by this time grown old and feeble. Never again would there be a bone of contention between the neighbors—or their dogs. Through the mind of the baker's wife kept running a word she had read or heard somewhere:

"A little child shall lead them."

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